

# Learning to Pray

Part 7 - "Fighting with Prayer"

Scripture: Romans 15:30-33

Delivered at Central Baptist Church on Nov 24, 2019, by Pastor Steven Edelman

**(SLIDE 1)** Good morning. We want to welcome you to Central this morning. Today, we are finishing off our series "**Learning to Pray.**" It's our aim in this series to help us to learn to pray and mature in your prayer life. We also want you to experience God in new and powerful ways!

Today, I want to try to answer two questions: **1. Are you spiritually awake when life's struggles come? 2. How do you use the power of prayer to find victory in your life?** As you are going to see, we need to wake up and fight with prayer in order to find victory in our life.

**STORY: Are you spiritually awake?** When I was 12 years old, my bedroom backed onto the backyard at ground level. In the middle of the night, around 3 am a subtle noise woke me up. It wasn't loud or alarming at the time. It was enough to get me to open my eyes. Laying in the darkness, I saw a hand slowly moving the screen off of my bedroom window. Laying there in that moment, I was paralyzed by fear! Something inside of me said act now, or you will be in trouble. I then proceeded to jump up and flick on the lights and started screaming for "HELP!!!". This powerful cry for help seemed to be enough to scare off the intruder. It wasn't long until my dad came running urgently down the stairs to answer the call. After seeing what happened, my dad reached for the phone and called the police on behalf of the family. I remember the authorities doing everything possible to make sure that everything was safe and giving instructions on what to do if he came back!

I often wonder what would have happened if I laid there and did nothing! In one of the scenarios, **I would have stayed asleep and the threat could have easily defeated me as I would have been laying there unprotected.** In another scenario, **I would have attempted to fight an unmatched battle alone.** As a twelve-year-old, I may have thought I was Superman and could have somehow used my superpowers in the middle of the struggle. However, my twelve-year-old self would have most likely been defeated by this intruder who could have been armed. Either way, the story would have turned out very differently if I had not called for help!

Just like in the story, we need to wake up and call for help by fighting with the power of prayer when we encounter struggles. Our struggle may be with others. We may need to fight with prayer against unforgiveness, against lies, against envy, against gossip, or against fear. All of us face inner battles! We may need to fight with prayer against pride, against a false identity, against negative self-talk, against shame, and against the vices that keep us in darkness. Ultimately, I want to show you that praying urgently can help us to have victory in the spiritual battle that is happening all around us. **Are you spiritually awake, so you can call for help?**

**In order to see victory in our life, we need to be spiritually awake so we can fight with the power of prayer in our struggle.**

## **1. FIGHT WITH PRAYER IN OUR STRUGGLE (SLIDE 2)**

Romans 15:30 says, "***I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers...***"

Paul begins with a series of strongly emotive expressions. “I appeal to you ... to join me ... by praying to God for me.” **Paul is asking others to pray with urgency and persistence in his struggle.** Why? It’s because Paul is on the front lines of a spiritual battle. Paul knows that he needs the power of God to fight as he is moving the message of the gospel forward. Paul is looking again and sees that what he is called to do is going to be difficult. He sees the outward and inner difficulty that is coming to oppose him. This is why Paul says, “I am pleading with you, brothers and sisters in Christ, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, **to join me in my struggle** by praying to God for me.”

The words “*I appeal to you, brothers, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit... Pray for me! add a little weight!*” It’s not a flippant request. There is some urgency and need behind these words because Paul is fighting to move the gospel forward. He is saying that if you are in Christ Jesus and have the same love of the Spirit, Pray! Join me in this spiritual battle. You see, Paul is risking his life to advance the gospel and he understands that it’s worth giving everything for. Paul is awake. He has experienced the powerful love of the Spirit moving through him and can see the greater struggle that is happening. **The struggle doesn’t stop him from moving the gospel forward. He is filled with a vision of God, bringing the gospel to those who need victory.**

Let’s look again at Romans 15:30 which says, “*I appeal to you, brothers (and sisters), by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to **strive together with me in your prayers to God...***”

#### **Strive together**

The word strive means ‘to agonize’ which describes the struggle in a conflict. In other words, Paul is saying to agonize or fight together in prayer. The same word is used to describe our Lord’s prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane in Luke 22:44. Jesus fought in prayer because he knew struggle was coming and he was about to die on the cross. Paul is reminding us that our prayer life is more of a battleground than comfortable phrases that we say before we eat and sleep that makes us feel good. It’s not, “I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep!”

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

When I was a camp counselor, wrestling was a big thing. The guys would take all of the mattresses and put them on the floor and up the walls to make things livelier. All of the guys would surround the area holding mattresses. It was a mattress cage match! In those matches, I would see striving and agony. One would try to bring the other into submission. If one slacks. The other attacks! **What is your fight? Or what is the fight that you have been called to?**

This is why Paul is saying that we need to strive together in prayer. Sin wants to have you! You need to be vigilant! Are you engaged in this fight? Jesus views our life as a battle. Many of us are wounded from sin. These wounds make us vulnerable. Think of it this way. How easy is it to put to death a wounded animal? A wounded animal is susceptible to its prey.

#### **APPLICATION:**

**In our struggle, this is why we need to fight with the power of prayer!** With prayer, you can start to see how the enemy is attacking you and others.

## What does it mean to strive together in prayer?

- **(SLIDE 3)** We are to fight together against the sin in our lives that hinders our prayers ([Psalm 66:18](#)—"If I regard wickedness in my heart, the Lord will not hear")?

Through praying scripture, you can fight against unforgiveness, against lies, against envy, against gossip, or against fear! Through prayer you can fight against inner battles so that gospel can move forward in our own heart. **In that struggle, we may need to fight with prayer against pride, against a false identity, against negative self-talk, against shame, and the against the vices that keep you spiritually sleeping. It's through prayer that we are reminded that there is a spiritual battle going on.** A battle in which Satan wants to defeat you. He wants you to think that it's simply others related, like a boss, like a spouse, a co-worker, or drink, or emotions are the problem. However, we forgot that there is a spiritual world that is influencing our physical world! We forget that we are under spiritual attack.

- **(SLIDE 4)** We are to fight together against the unbelief that threatens our faith as we pray ([Mark 9:24](#)—"Lord, I believe, help my unbelief")?
- **(SLIDE 5)** We are to fight together against the distractions—mostly innocent in themselves—that keep us from finding time and focusing in prayer ([1 Peter 4:7](#)—"Be of sound judgment and sober for the purpose of prayer")?
- **(SLIDE 6)** We are to fight together against Satan and his principalities and powers ([Ephesians 6:12](#)—"For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers")?

Yes, there are many enemies and obstacles that we struggle against. **This is why we find prayer so difficult. There are so many opponents.** If the enemy can cut off the power source or the supply line, the whole army suffers, able to do nothing.

**This is a key point. So, how do we fight with prayer in difficulty? We need to wake up and call on God for help. We need to urgently and persistently call for help. We need to strive together in prayer in the fight.**

In order to see victory in our life, we need to be spiritually awake so we can fight with the power of prayer in the struggle.

**Secondly, in order to see victory in our life, we need to be spiritually awake so we can fight with the power of prayer for others.**

### 2. **FIGHT WITH PRAYER FOR OTHERS (SLIDE 7)**

Look with me at the end of Romans 15:30 which says, "*to strive together with me in your prayers to God 'on **my** behalf!*" Notice the words '**on my behalf!**' Paul is asking Christians to intercede in prayer for him. The definition of intercede is to get involved, act, or speak on behalf of another person. To act as a mediator.

**Intercessory prayer is not praying for yourself, for your direction, or for your personal matters. When we intercede for someone, we go beyond praying for their needs.** Intercession is praying with the real hope and real intent that God would step in and intervene according to His will for someone else. It's an **act of love**

for others. It's also an **act of trusting** God with the circumstance and timing. At best, intercession is stirring up **God's heart and passion in us for others.**

**(SLIDE 8)** Austin Phelps says, **"We are never more like Christ than in the prayers of intercession."**

**When we don't know what to pray, Romans says 8:27** "the Holy Spirit also prays or "intercedes" for us!" **Sometimes going to God and asking for help is enough when we don't have the words to say!** *Paul is saying that we should pray for him on his behalf that he might be freed from the opposition of outsiders who try to destroy their ministry.*

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

A couple of years ago, I heard my wife scream around midnight. It was more of stuttering, "Steeeeeven, I NEED YOU!" I jumped out of bed wearing nothing but my sleeping attire. From the top floor of our house looking down, I see our cat with a large mouse in our entranceway! The cat was laying there proud of his gift to us. I noticed it was alive. So, I told Megan to keep an eye on it just in case the cat let it go. I went into the garage and got some gloves and a broom. Then, I heard an even louder scream. Megan is now standing on the kitchen table in terror because the mouse ran under a shelf. At this point, I move the shelf, and the mouse starts running around the house. I am chasing this thing in my sleeping attire trying to stop it with a broom! When I started hitting the floor with the broom trying to trap the mouse, the cat thought I was trying to hit him, so he started running around in a frenzy. Suddenly, there was a mass panic until I caught the mouse. In a roundabout way, I was asked to catch a mouse on Megan's behalf.

Just like in this story, Paul is asking us to pray on his behalf as he sees opposition coming.

#### **APPLICATION:**

**If you are leading a Jesus centered ministry or life, you will be a prime target for attack. This is why Paul is asking for prayer on His behalf.** The truth is that opposition can come in many forms when leading ministry. Remember, the attack can come in the form of outward and inward struggles. **This is why we need to pray for missionaries, church planters, pastors, and other spiritual leaders. There are many needs we should keep in mind.** We can quickly put ministry leaders and pastors up on a pedestal and forget that they are facing human temptation and opposition from the enemy.

For example, **leaders can be** often careless in relationships with the opposite sex and have fallen as a result. Many of you know the Christian Comedian John Crist. His bio says, "With more than one billion video views, more than four million online followers, and sold-out tours from coast to coast, John Crist is one of today's fastest-rising stand-up comics." The headline as of two weeks ago, "John Crist Cancels 2019 Tour Dates After Reports of Sexting, Sexual Misconduct, Manipulation!"

Other famous pastors have reported that women have assigned themselves the job of seducing them and bringing them down, one of them with notable success. We should pray that Christian leaders might be liberated from the opposition of outsiders who try to destroy their ministry.

The truth is that we are all facing opposition and need to pray for each other. Christians can always help a struggling brother or sister by praying. We can give up our

time for those who are giving up their lives, in prayer. **We may not be on the mission field, but we are always to be on mission by being on our knees.** This is why we need to wake up and fight with prayer!

**As we have seen, we need to be spiritually awake so we can fight with the power of prayer for others.**

**Lastly, in order to see victory in our life, we need to be spiritually awake so we can fight with prayer with His means for deliverance.**

### **3. FIGHT WITH PRAYER WITH MEANS FOR DELIVERANCE (SLIDE 9)**

Look with me at Romans 15:31 which says, *“<sup>31</sup>that I may be delivered from the unbelievers in Judea, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints...”*

**Again, Paul gives this strong and very passionate plea for deliverance.**

Why? We know that Paul was carrying with him a substantial amount of money collected by the churches in Macedonia and Achaia (uh-Kay-uh) as a gift to believers in Jerusalem (15:26). But he knew he might not be accepted, slandered, beaten, thrown in prison, or killed despite the good he was trying to do. The reason is that there were many unconverted Jews in Jerusalem who not only thought of Paul as an extremely dangerous person, but they also believed that he was destroying the very foundations of God’s biblical revelation in the Mosaic covenant. Just like Jesus, Paul was misunderstood by the Jews who put his life in danger. This is why Paul is praying for deliverance as he continues to tell others of the good news of Jesus.

Paul also knew what it meant to pray and access the spiritual means that were given to Him. **In Acts 20:22-23, we also see that the Holy Spirit had continually warned him of the dangers that lay ahead.** The Holy Spirit gave Paul the **means to see and discern the evil ploys against him.** Remember, Paul **appealed to** the believers in Rome to enter into his conflict by joining him in prayer. The reality of intense spiritual opposition moved him to **request urgently** that his friends in Christ join him in the struggle.

Through prayer, Paul was able to see the spiritual landscape through spiritual eyes. As he seeks to tell others about Christ, he anticipates spiritual opposition and invites others to fight with him through the power of prayer. Prayer not only changes us. **But prayer also helps us see things spiritually.** Prayer helps us see who God is. Prayer helps us see the bigger picture of what God has done for us. Prayer helps us connect to the power source so that we can see what we need for victory. **Prayer gives us the means to spiritual victory.** When we fight with prayer, we are engaged in a great spiritual struggle against the devil and his schemes.

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

As I was writing this sermon, my laptop went dead while I was sitting on the couch. I could see the power outlet across the room. However, I needed to go and find the power cable. In my tired state, it felt like an inconvenience to get up, find the power cord and plug it in. I felt like closing the lid and leaving the thing dead because it was just easier. Are we not like that with our prayer life?

#### **How do we get the means and power for victory? (SLIDE 10)**

Romans 13:14 says, “So then let us cast off the works of darkness and **put on the armor of light.** <sup>13</sup> Let us walk properly as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and sensuality, not in quarreling and jealousy.

**14 But put on the Lord Jesus Christ**, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires.”

**We find victory by putting on the armor of light. Or by putting on Christ!**

What does it mean to put on the armor of light or putting on Christ? It’s a metaphor for taking off the deeds of darkness and putting on the armor of light! Paul is saying, instead of being involved in **(sin)** carousing, drunkenness, and the like, you should rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ. In Ephesians 6:11, he says put on the full armor of God. In Galatians 5:16–17 Paul describes it as, ‘Walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. **When people live by the Spirit, they are enabled to resist the desires of the sinful nature (cf. Gal. 5:22–24).** “When we compare 13:13–14 with Galatians 5:16–24, it seems clear that to clothe oneself with the Lord Jesus Christ is equivalent to living by the Spirit. **Both lead to overcoming the desires of the sinful nature and promoting Christian character and virtues.”<sup>1</sup> **If your flesh is running your life, passions, and emotions, you are vulnerable because you have taken off your armor.** It’s time to put it on again.**

**ILLUSTRATION:**

**For example, there have been times in which we have purchased new clothes for our kids. We have laid them out for them to see. For some reason, they still want to wear their old dirty, stained clothes. Even if they are filthy! We are just like that when we continue to live in our old ways when better ways have been supplied.** The good news is that the armor of God is completely supplied for us. Your victory has been fully provided. But until you grab hold of them in faith and put on Christ, you can’t live in victory.

The good news is that you can put on the things of God in faith. You will know that it was God who secured these things because your life will change in such a way that only God can get the credit. Strongholds and problems that you’ve struggled with for years and even decades can be changed overnight when things are done God’s way.

**(SLIDE 11)** Timothy Keller says, **“Prayer is the way that all the things we believe in and that Christ has won for us actually become our strength. Prayer is the way that truth is worked into your heart to create new instincts, reflexes, and dispositions.”**

Look with me at Romans 15:32 which says, <sup>32</sup> so that by God’s will I may come to you with joy and be refreshed in your company. <sup>33</sup> May the God of peace be with you all. Amen.” Paul addresses God as “the God of peace,” that is, “the God who gives peace.” Peace comes from God: if men want true peace, they must seek it in God. This is why we need to put on Christ, so that the God of peace will be with you.

**APPLICATION:**

**What keeps us from accessing the means in which God has given us?**

Maybe it’s our pride. Maybe it’s our endless distractions. Or our self-dependence where we have fooled ourselves into thinking we can do it on our own. Maybe we are wounded. Maybe we are spiritually asleep, and you can’t see what God is trying to show you. Maybe we think that the battle between angels and demons is going on

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<sup>1</sup> Kruse, C. G. (2012). [\*Paul’s Letter to the Romans\*](#). (D. A. Carson, Ed.) (pp. 506–507). Cambridge, U.K.; Nottingham, England; Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos.

above us. Sometimes the battle is right in our hearts!

We do ourselves a disservice when we don't spend time with Jesus and learn to access His truth. The cliché is, "our Bible is collecting dust by the bedside." The reality is that at most bedsides, our Bible has been replaced with a remote or an app. Our armor gets packed away in a box somewhere and we say, "It didn't work for me." When the battle comes, we can quickly call a friend for a human solution. Sometimes that can help. However, what was needed goes beyond a conversation with heaping advice. **We need an encounter with God! Prayer is the way that you release the supernatural power in your life, in your marriage, and in your ministry.** God has given us everything we need to display His glory in our own lives.

### **(SLIDE 12) Prayer + God's Word = Power**

**Story:** In the book *Power of Prayer*, "The pastor, commentator and evangelist, Dwight L. Moody of Chicago, went to England for a rest. He did not intend to preach. He only wanted to hear Charles Spurgeon, George Mueller, and some others. But one Sunday he was invited to preach in a Congregational church in north London, and he accepted.

**Sunday morning did not go well. Moody said that he had "no power, no liberty; it seemed like pulling a heavy train up a steep grade." It was so bad that he tried to get out of preaching the evening service, for which he had also been invited, but the minister would not let him off.**

That evening it was quite different. **Moody felt unusual power**, and when he got to the end, he decided to give an invitation. He asked all who wanted to accept Christ to get to their feet, and about five hundred people did. Moody thought there must be some mistake, perhaps they just didn't understand him. So, he asked them to sit down. Then he said, "After this meeting there will be an after-service in the vestry, and I invite all who are serious about receiving Christ to come to that meeting." There was a door to the vestry on each side of the pulpit, and when the service was over the people began to stream through. Moody went into the vestry and repeated the invitation in even stronger terms, and the people all once again expressed their willingness to become Christians. Moody still thought there must be some mistake. He said, "I have to go to Ireland tomorrow, but your pastor will still be here and if you really mean what you have just said, come tomorrow night and meet with him again." **A few days later, when he was in Ireland, Moody received a telegram from the minister saying, "There were more people here on Monday night than on Sunday. A revival has broken out in our church, and you must return from Ireland and help me." Moody did return, and what happened in those days was the basis for the invitations that later took him back to England and then over the whole world as an evangelist.** (*The Power of Prayer*, pp. 44–47)."

#### **Conclusion:**

If God removed His Spirit from our church, would anything change? What about our ministries? What about our homes? What about the way we live? This is why we need to fight with prayer with the power of Christ. We need to fight with His means. We get that power by encountering and knowing Christ.

**This is why we need to be reminded of the means and power of Christ.**

**Through His means:**

- We are forgiven.
- We are set free.
- We have His mighty power working within us.
- We are more than conquerors through Christ.
- We are overcomers in this life because He has overcome, and our lives are hidden in Christ with God.
- We have victory because Jesus Christ died on the cross, which extends over everything—every event, every enemy, every threat—literally *everything*.

**Paul was spiritually awake and could see the struggles that were coming his way. He asked people to pray on his behalf. He accessed the power of God in the difficulty so that He could fight with prayer with His means for deliverance. Are you awake?**

**As we close this series, I would like to lead you in a time of prayers before we sing.**

**PRAYER:**

1. What is your struggle? What is your fight? Ask God to give you spiritual insight into the situation? What does He want to teach you? What does he want to say to you?
2. Who needs your prayer on their behalf?
3. Who needs to experience the power of God today? Maybe you are wounded and need to put on the armor of light. The armor of Christ!